

## Top 10 Nebraska News Stories, 2007<sup>51</sup>

1. Robert Hawkins killed eight people and himself during a Dec. 5 rampage at the Westroads Mall in Omaha. Police said the crime, which was the deadliest mall shooting in U.S. history, was the random act of a troubled 19-year-old.

2. The Cornhuskers struggled through a 5-7 season that saw athletic director Steve Pederson and head coach Bill Callahan fired, former coach Tom Osborne return as athletic director and former Husker defensive coordinator Bo Pelini hired as the new head coach.

3. A late 2006 ice storm knocked out power to much of central and northeastern Nebraska for weeks in January. More than 30,000 utility customers lost power and utilities spent months repairing transmission lines, towers and other parts of the network.

4. After intense speculation, U.S. Sen. Chuck Hagel announced that he would not run for president or for re-election. Former Gov. Mike Johanns stepped down as U.S. secretary of agriculture to seek the Republican nomination for Hagel's seat.

5. Lexington schoolteacher Kelsey Peterson fled to Mexico with a 13-year-old former student. Peterson was arrested in Mexicali, Mexico on charges of taking a minor across state lines for sex.

6. More ethanol plants came on line in Nebraska, following a boom in U.S. ethanol consumption.

7. As a result of the ethanol boom, corn prices nearly doubled early in the year. Prices stayed strong throughout 2007.

8. The burned body of Chadron State math professor Steve Haataja was found tied to a tree in rural Dawes County, more than four months after he mysteriously disappeared.

9. Nebraska lawmakers approved a plan to help send more Republican River water to Kansas in an attempt to avoid a lawsuit. Kansas contends that Nebraska took nearly 47 billion gallons of water more than it was due from 2003 to 2006.

10. The Legislature voted to reorganize the 11 school districts in Douglas and Sarpy counties into a learning community that will share a common property tax base. The law brought resolution to an ongoing struggle over how to deliver education in the Omaha Public Schools.

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<sup>51</sup> Source: Associated Press; surveys of Nebraska newspaper editors and broadcast news directors.

## Top 10 Nebraska News Stories, 2008

1. Nebraska lawmakers passed a safe haven law intended to protect newborns from abandonment. Passed without an age limit, the law resulted in the abandonment of 36 children, mostly preteens and teenagers. In a November special session, the Legislature limited the safe haven provisions to children 30 days old or younger.

2. Nebraska Democrats held their first-ever presidential caucuses in February and succeeded in capturing one of the state's electoral college votes in November. President Barack Obama won the electoral vote tied to Nebraska's 2nd Congressional District by winning the district's popular vote. It was the first time that Nebraska has split its electoral votes under the state's unique system.

3. Bo Pelini steered the Nebraska football team to an 8-4 regular season in his first year as head coach.

4. The national economic crisis was felt in Nebraska as falling sales forced employers to close plants and cut jobs across the state.

5. The Nebraska Supreme Court ruled that electrocution, the state's only method of execution, was unconstitutionally cruel and unusual punishment. The ruling left Nebraska without a means of carrying out death sentences.

6. Record oil prices resulted in \$4 per gallon gasoline early in the year.

7. Four boy scouts were killed in June when a tornado hit their camp near Blencoe, Iowa, just across the Missouri River from Nebraska. Three of the boys were from Omaha.

8. Three people were released from jail after DNA evidence cleared them of the 1985 rape and murder of Helen Wilson in Beatrice. The case was the first time in Nebraska history that inmates were freed based on DNA evidence.

9. Wide fluctuations in the price of corn caused concern in the ethanol and beef industries.

10. As oil prices fell, ethanol became less profitable and the tightening credit market made it difficult for companies to borrow money, resulting in a slowdown in the construction of ethanol plants across the state. The nation's No. 2 ethanol producer, VeraSun Energy, filed for bankruptcy protection, causing concern about ethanol's future and the potential impact on corn producing states like Nebraska.